

THE S.T.F.U. NEWS



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TO OUR READERS

We wish at this time to express our regret to the many subscribers to the Sharecroppers' Voice who have failed to receive the paper for many months. Due to financial difficulties we have had to suspend publication of the paper. In order that our members and friends may be informed of the work going on in the Union "THE S.T.F.U. NEWS" will be issued at least once each month until such time as publication of the "Sharecroppers' Voice" can be resumed.

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FOURTH ANNUAL CONVENTION HELD IN LITTLE ROCK

The Fourth Annual Convention of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union was held in Little Rock, the state capitol of Arkansas, February 25, 26, 27. This was without doubt the finest and most productive convention yet held by the Union.

Officers were elected for the coming year as follows: J. R. Butler, President, E. B. McKinney, Vice-President, O. H. Whitfield, Second Vice-President. The following members were elected to the National Executive Board: J. E. Clayton, Texas; B. E. Treadway, Mississippi, Odie L. Sweeden, Oklahoma, W. S. Simmons, Oklahoma, Howard Kester, Tennessee, D. A. Griffin, Arkansas, J. F. Hynds, Arkansas, W. L. Blackstone, Arkansas, C. C. Williams, Arkansas and W. B. Moore, Missouri. H. L. Mitchell was reemployed as Secretary.

The Convention was marked by ordered procedure and intelligent deliberation. Delegates had been carefully instructed by their locals and came to the Convention with definite ideas of what they wanted done. Each delegate selected a discussion group and participated in the general discussions on the problems of the Union. The Divisions dealt with "Education and Organization", "Legal Rights" and "Government Programs". On the basis of the discussions a program for the year 1938 was adopted.

The program included a demand for the extension of the National Labor Relations Act to cover agricultural labor of all types. The program also advocates the immediate establishment of cooperative farm projects by the United States Government to provide a means of living for those who have been displaced from the land, stating that "such displaced labor constitutes a menace to the welfare and well-being of the employed industrial population as well as persons still finding employment on the soil." The immediate establishment of a National Tenancy Authority independent of any other governmental agency was also advanced as a means of effecting employment of the farm population.

A strong resolution dealing with war was also passed. This resolution favored the enactment of a constitutional amendment giving the people the right to vote upon a declaration of war by the government except in case of actual

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invasion of the United States and unreservedly opposing the idea of war, good or bad. It further opposed the appropriation of \$300,000,000 asked by President Roosevelt for the purpose of building battleships, and urged Congress to appropriate this money for the "constructive purpose of re-establishing the landless farmers upon the land."

The Convention favored written contracts for landlords and tenants for the protection of both parties. In addition to asking that the National Labor Relations Board be extended to agriculture there was a demand for enactment of state labor laws modeled upon the Wagner Act. The repeal of the Poll Tax law disfranchising citizens in seven southern states was demanded. A health program for the poverty stricken population of the South under government auspices was included in the demands.

The United States Department of Justice was commended for its vigorous prosecution of Peonage cases in the south, and Governor Carl E. Bailey, Arkansas' "New Deal" Governor, was praised for "his defense of the civil liberties of those who so often in the past have sought protection in vain."

Guests who addressed the Convention included Dr. Alva Taylor, former faculty member of Vanderbilt University; John M. White, assistant supervisor of the Farm Landlord-Tenant Relationship Department of the Oklahoma Extension Service; Arthur B. Adams, Dean of the College of Business Administration, University of Oklahoma; Dr. Willard Uphaus, Secretary, National Religion and Labor Foundation and R. L. Fraser, County Judge Woodruff County, Arkansas.

The only incident to mar the proceedings of the Convention was the eviction from the hall that had been rented for the entire session weeks in advance. The Convention was instructed to vacate the premises on the second day of the Convention. The owner of the property, R. W. Manning who stated that he was a former official of the Farm Debt Adjustment Administration and the President of the Young Democrats' Club of Texas, claimed that he did not previously know that the sharecroppers' organization was a part of the C.I.O. and ordered the Convention out of the hall. Manning also objected to the fact that Negroes and whites were seated together as delegates to the Convention, stating that "down in Texas where he came from they lynched Niggers instead of mixing up with them."

When the delegates were notified that they were being evicted they were just beginning their Saturday morning session and the union song, "We Shall Not be Moved" was being sung. Upon being told that the Convention was being evicted from its meeting place and that another hall would be found they quietly gathered up their belongings and marched down the street a few blocks and again assembled for the business of the Convention. The resulting delay led to late sessions that night and a worn but enthusiastic delegation left Little Rock by bus, truck and the highway on Sunday afternoon.

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NATIONAL SHARECROPPERS' WEEK HELD IN 18 CITIES

National Sharecroppers' Week was observed in 18 large cities in the United States this year with numerous meetings which were addressed by leaders of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union.

Among the highlights of the "Week" was a radio broadcast over CBS of addresses by Norman Thomas and Mordecai Ezekiel, the latter representing the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The Week was held under the joint auspices of the Workers Defense League of New York City and the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. The object was to further acquaint the general public with the work of the Union as well as to raise funds for the legal defense work of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. Among those who represented the Union in various cities were J. R. Butler, Howard Kester, Odie L. Sweeden, H. L. Mitchell, D. A. Griffin, Henrietta McGhee and Myrtle Lawrence.

We want at this time to express our gratitude to the many friends who arranged and contributed to activities of the Week. Much credit for the successful outcome of the Week is due the Workers Defense League for the excellent arrangements made and to Miss Harriet Young, Secretary of NSW, who was responsible for the organization of committees and sponsors in the 18 cities where Sharecroppers' Week was observed.

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FLOGGING CASES TO BE PROSECUTED

Final papers were recently served upon floggers of Jim Reese, Eliza Nolden, and Willie Sue Blagden at Earle Arkansas by the United States Marshal for the Eastern Arkansas District. The cases are being handled by C. A. Stanfield of Hot Springs, Arkansas, assisted by George Slaff, attorney of New York City and representative of the Workers Defense League. Mr. N. N. Fowler who was formerly in charge of the cases has recently accepted a job with the National Labor Relations Board and is stationed at Denver, Colorado. At present the flogging cases are scheduled to be tried in the May term of court at Jonesboro. The cases are civil suits for damages and grew out of an attack on a picket line led by Jim Reese during the cotton-choppers strike of 1936.

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SENATE URGED TO CONSIDER UNION WAR RESOLUTION

H. L. Mitchell, Secretary of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, recently forwarded to members of the United States Senate copies of a strong Anti-War Resolution adopted at the recent annual convention in Little Rock.

The Resolution specifically urged "that the \$1,200,000,000 that has been asked of Congress by the President for the purpose of building battle-ships whereby men may be killed be appropriated for the constructive purpose of reestablishing the landless farmers of the nation upon the soil in order that they may live."

The Resolution advocated the creation of instrumentalities by the government for establishing cooperative farm projects in the cotton producing states as a means of securing adequate living for those who till the soil, and also urged the immediate establishment of a National Tenancy Authority empowered to deal specifically with the problem of farm tenancy.

A call was included in the resolution urging other organizations of farmers and workers throughout America to support the plea of the tenant farmers for constructive use of the billion two hundred million dollars and to join in acting to prevent America from becoming involved in another war to make the "World Safe for Peace and Democracy."

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W.D.L. TO PUSH PEONAGE INVESTIGATION IN THE SOUTH

According to Brendan Sexton, newly elected Executive Secretary of the W.D.L., the Workers Defense League will soon begin a campaign to end peonage in the South. Investigations extending throughout the South will be made of the holding in slavery of American citizens. The cooperation of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union in assembling material dealing with peonage in the cotton fields has been assured. It is planned to conduct investigations and assemble facts to be presented to the Department of Justice for prosecution under the "Anti-Slavery Statute". Several convictions in various southern states have been secured following the conviction of Paul D. Peacher, former town marshal of Earle, Arkansas, in 1936.

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NEW COTTON MACHINES

A cotton chopping machine that it is claimed really chops cotton is now on the market and in use in Texas and on certain farms in the Mississippi

Delta. According to testimonials from planters who used the machine during 1937 a saving in labor of 50% to 75% was made by this machine in chopping their cotton crops at a cost of 10 to 12¢ per acre. The Rust Cotton Picking Machine Co. and the International Harvester Co. are both reported to be manufacturing a number of cotton picking machines during the year 1938. The result of perfection of both the cotton picking machine and cotton chopping machine, along with the present trend in the use of tractors for cotton farming, may in the next few years completely change the southern farming scene making it more necessary than ever for unionization of cotton workers.

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S.T.F.U MEMBERS GET W.P.A. JOBS

Several hundred members of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union have recently been put to work on W.P.A. projects. Some locals report that a large percentage of their members who have been unable to get crops for 1938 have been given relief work. Members who have crops and jobs on the farm are of course ineligible for W.P.A. work. The fact that a large number of unemployed farm workers have been given jobs is a great victory for the Union. On January 1st a relief survey was made under the direction of the general office and figures and facts as to the great need for relief in rural areas was presented to Washington officials by the Union. Complaints against County Welfare Boards discriminating against members of the Union were also forwarded to Washington and where proven conclusively were investigated and corrected. Some locals were not successful in getting relief due to the fact that they did not follow instructions and get their members certified.

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PLANTER CONTRACT IN FIELD

A copy of a contract that is being circulated throughout the Mississippi Delta by the Staple Cotton Discount Corporation has been forwarded to Henry A. Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture. The provisions of this private contract constitute an attempt by plantation owners to circumvent the provisions of the 1938 cotton control measure recently adopted by the Congress of the United States.

In an accompanying letter to Secretary Wallace, Mitchell stated that five acre exemption allowed each family was providing a means whereby landowners might secure a ready supply of low paid wage workers throughout the year to produce the cotton on land allotted to the plantation for cotton production.

The contract that is being circulated in an attempt to get around provisions of the 1938 cotton control measure provides that sharecroppers will receive only 40% of the net proceeds of the cotton raised by him, 60 % being given to the landlord. Government payments are to be divided on the same basis.

Mitchell stated that unless rules and regulations are immediately adopted by the Department of Agriculture to prevent these abuses the 1938 cotton control program will in all probability upset the entire agricultural economy of the South and result in the further displacement of thousands of sharecropper families.

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GRIFFIN MADE STATE ORGANIZER FOR ARKANSAS

D. A. Griffin of McCrory was recently chosen by the Executive Council of the S.T.F.U. as the State Organizer for Arkansas. According to Brother Griffin his first efforts will be directed toward the establishment of functioning County Central Councils in all Arkansas Counties where the required number of Locals exist.

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON UNEMPLOYMENT HEARS KESTER

Howard Kester, Southern Tenant Farmers' Union Executive Council member, appeared before the Senate Committee on Unemployment in Washington, D. C. on March 8th to tell government officials of the desperate condition of thousands of sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the South and to urge that adequate relief be given them.

Kester declared that because the plantation system was being liquidated, sharecroppers and tenant farmers were facing a situation more grave than at any time since the Civil War. The South, he added, was trying unsuccessfully to cope with the problem of a lost world market for cotton, the introduction of the cotton picking and cotton chopping machines and the increased use of tractors.

He contended that neither increased industrialization of these people nor settlement on individual bits of land was a solution of the problem. He advocated the building of a village cooperative economy to permit the use of the best farm machinery for the benefit of all and the furnishing of decent medical service, hospitals and schools, not now available to most of the people.

He called upon the Department of Justice to increase its activity against peonage offenders. He advocated restricting the age at which children may work in the fields and of the number of hours which women and children may be allowed to work. He suggested the establishment of minimum wages for agricultural laborers. He also urge abolition of the poll tax which disenfranchises many thousands of workers.

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MUSKOGEE TO HOLD EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE

An educational conference will be held in Muskogee, Oklahoma on April 23rd. Secretaries and Presidents of all Oklahoma Locals have been invited to attend and to take part in the discussion. Following the conference a general meeting will be held which will be addressed by union leaders and prominent Oklahoma citizens. Special entertainment of an educational nature will be given in the form of a free moving picture of tenant farming conditions in South east Oklahoma. The meetings will be held at the Knights of Pythias Hall, Okmulgee Street.

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STATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO MEET

In line with recent constitutional changes made by the Annual Convention of the Union, Odis L. Sweeden, State Organizer for Oklahoma, announces the first meeting of the State Executive Committee of Oklahoma to be held at Muskogee on Sunday April 24th. The Committee will draft a program for Oklahoma Locals and elect officers for the year 1938.

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TEXAS ORGANIZATION GROWING

Plans for rapid organization in Texas are underway. W. L. Blackstone of Cross County Arkansas and former member of the President's Farm Tenancy Commission may go to Texas to assist in organizing the State. J. E. Clayton, Texas Negro leader, orator and teacher, has already made an excellent beginning with the establishment of six new locals in East Texas. Locals on the West Plains in the Panhandle are renewing their efforts and the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union expects 40,000 new members in Texas before the next annual convention. Locals will be organized in each county and County Councils immediately organized to work out a program based on local conditions.

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TEXAS PECAN SHELLERS WIN STRIKE

A strike involving 6,000 workers in the pecan shelling industry was recently settled in San Antonio with recognition of Local 172, United Cannery.

Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America as the collective bargaining agent for its members. Wage cuts were restored and a provision made for arbitration of future disputes. During the strike over 1,000 arrests were made and police violence of all sorts was used.

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KESTER TO ADDRESS UNION LOCALS

Howard Kester, Executive Council member, writer and lecturer on southern rural problems, will spend the first two weeks of April visiting locals in Arkansas. Kester along with other union leaders will address a Union Rally at Antioch Schoolhouse near Colt on Sunday April 10th in the afternoon. The Cross County Central Council will also be organized that day.

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MOORE TO WORK IN MISSOURI

W. B. Moore, President of the Blytheville, Arkansas Local and member of the National Executive Council, will begin work organizing locals in South-East Missouri on April 1st. Brother Moore will assist O. H. Whitfield, Second Vice-President of the S.T.F.U. in the work of organizing Missouri.

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COOPERATIVE FARM CELEBRATES SECOND ANNIVERSARY

The Delta Cooperative Farm at Rochdale, Mississippi near Hillhouse celebrated its second birthday on March 26th. A program of athletic events was held during the afternoon with a barbecue and general meeting in the Community House in the evening. Addresses were made by members of the Farm and by the director, Sam Franklin. A group from the Union office attended the celebration and official greeting from the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union was given by President J. R. Butler.

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BOOKS WORTH READING

We highly recommend "The Wasted Land" by Gerald W. Johnson, published by the University of North Carolina Press, for its clear and brief analysis of the vital problems facing the South. Mr. Johnson's book is based upon the work of Dr. Howard W. Odum "Southern Regions of the United States" which is too detailed for general reading except for those who wish to make a complete study of the South and its complex problems.

For those who like fiction as a means to understanding the underlying social and economic problems, we recommend "The Sharecropper" by Charlie May Simon. Written by an Arkansas woman the scene is laid in Eastern Arkansas. The story is written around the Union, but shows little understanding of the hope that it has given the people for the future. Conditions are realistically and sympathetically portrayed and the author is obviously not a propagandist. We feel that the story of the sharecropper, however, is yet to be written.

"You Have Seen Their Faces" by Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell is a stirring and excellent story in pictures of the sharecropper in the South. The photography by Miss Bourke-White is exceptionally beautiful. Mr. Caldwell who has written the prose accompanying the pictures is not so inclined to play up the horrors of incidents in this book as he has in previous stories dealing with his native southland.

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WATCH FOR NEXT ISSUE OF S.T.F.U. NEWS

The next issue of the S.T.F.U. News will contain a full explanation of the provisions of the 1938 Cotton Contract. It will also contain the rules and regulations which are now in process of being worked out by Secretary Wallace.

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NEWS FLASH: We have just received information that Secretary Wallace is now investigating the contract being circulated by the Staple Cotton Discount Corporation which was recently brought to his attention by the Union.